



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Landmark Designation Case Report

Hearing Date: November 1, 2017
Case No.: 2017-011910DES
Project Address: No address is associated with the subject property; the Diamond Heights Safety Wall is located on the south side of Diamond Heights Boulevard at Clipper Street near Portola Drive on Block 7504, Lots 011-015; the nearest address is 5000 Diamond Heights Boulevard, located to the east of the structure
Zoning: RH-2
Block/Lots: 7504/011-015
Property Owner: City Property
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PROPERTY DESCRIPTIONS & SURROUNDING LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Diamond Heights Safety Wall is a large, outdoor, wooden sculpture located on the south side of Diamond Heights Boulevard at Clipper Street near Portola Drive in the Diamond Heights neighborhood. The site-specific work of public art was designed by Bay Area artist and architect, Stefan Alexander Novak (1918-2006), for the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency as part of its Diamond Heights redevelopment project. It was constructed in 1968. Acting in part as a gateway sign, the Diamond Heights Safety Wall serves as a visual landmark for the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The Diamond Heights Safety Wall is located adjacent to the Red Rock Hill Condominiums, designed by Cohen & Levorsen for the Red Rock Hill competition in a style that bridged the Second Bay Tradition and Midcentury Modern styles. Like the Red Rock Hill Condominiums and Bay Region Modernism, the Diamond Heights Safety Wall embodies a hybrid of Modernist design balanced with a distinctly Bay Area, organic influence in the material choice of untreated redwood.

The Diamond Heights Safety Wall is located within the RH-2 (Residential-House, Two Family) Zoning District and a 40-X Height and Bulk District.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The case before the Historic Preservation Commission is the consideration of the initiation of a Community-Sponsored Article 10 Landmark Designation Application for the Diamond Heights Safety Wall, which is located on the south side of Diamond Heights Boulevard at Clipper Street near Portola

Drive on Block 7504, Lots 011-015 as a San Francisco Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code, Section 1004.1, and recommending that the Board of Supervisors approve of such designation.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW STATUS

The Planning Department has determined that actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (specifically in this case, landmark designation) are exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight - Categorical).

GENERAL PLAN POLICIES

The Urban Design Element of the San Francisco General Plan contains the following relevant objectives and policies:

- OBJECTIVE 2: Conservation of Resources that provide a sense of nature, continuity with the past, and freedom from overcrowding.
- POLICY 4: Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development.

Designating significant historic resources as local landmarks will further continuity with the past because the buildings will be preserved for the benefit of future generations. Landmark designation will require that the Planning Department and the Historic Preservation Commission review proposed work that may have an impact on character-defining features. Both entities will utilize the Secretary of Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* in their review to ensure that only appropriate, compatible alterations are made.

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1 – GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Planning Code Section 101.1 – Eight Priority Policies establishes and requires review of permits for consistency with said policies. On balance, the proposed designation is consistent with the priority policies in that:

- a. The proposed designation will further Priority Policy No. 7, that landmarks and historic buildings be preserved. Designation of the Diamond Heights Safety Wall will help to preserve an important historical resource that is significant for its association with the Diamond Heights Redevelopment Project, as a notable work of local master artist and architect Stefan Alexander Novak (1918-2006), and as a visual landmark and gateway into the Diamond Heights neighborhood.

BACKGROUND / PREVIOUS ACTIONS

The Community-Sponsored Article 10 Landmark Designation Application was prepared and submitted by Robert Pullum on May 1, 2017. Additional research was conducted by Planning Department Historic Preservation Intern, Hannah Lee Simonson, under the supervision of Department Staff, Desiree Smith and Tim Frye. The final draft of the landmark designation fact sheet was completed by the Department in October 2017.

If the Historic Preservation Commission decides to initiate Article 10 landmark designation of the subject property, the item will be considered again by the Historic Preservation Commission at a subsequent hearing. At that time the Historic Preservation Commission may adopt a resolution recommending that the Board of Supervisors support the designation. The nomination would then be considered at a future Board of Supervisors hearing for formal Article 10 landmark designation.

APPLICABLE PRESERVATION STANDARDS

ARTICLE 10

Section 1004 of the Planning Code authorizes the landmark designation of an individual structure or other feature or an integrated group of structures and features on a single lot or site, having special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value, as a landmark. Section 1004.1 also outlines that landmark designation may be initiated by the Board of Supervisors or the Historic Preservation Commission and the initiation shall include findings in support. Section 1004.2 states that once initiated, the proposed designation is referred to the Historic Preservation Commission for a report and recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to approve, disapprove or modify the proposal.

Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, if the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors and without referral to the Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors shall hold a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation.

In the case of the initiation of a historic district, the Historic Preservation Commission shall refer its recommendation to the Planning Commission pursuant to Section 1004.2(c). The Planning Commission shall have 45 days to provide review and comment on the proposed designation and address the consistency of the proposed designation with the General Plan, Section 101.1 priority policies, the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation, and the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the Bay Area. These comments shall be sent to the Board of Supervisors in the form of a resolution.

Section 1004(b) requires that the designating ordinance approved by the Board of Supervisors shall include the location and boundaries of the landmark site, a description of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation, and a description of the particular features that should be preserved.

Section 1004.4 states that if the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days.

ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK CRITERIA

The Historic Preservation Commission on February 4, 2009, by Resolution No. 001, adopted the National Register Criteria as its methodology for recommending landmark designation of historic resources. Under the National Register Criteria, the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, workmanship, and association, and that

are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or properties that have yielded, or may likely yield, information important in prehistory or history.

PUBLIC / NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT

There is no known public or neighborhood opposition to designation of the Diamond Heights Safety Wall on Block 7504, Lots 011-015 as an Article 10 landmark. The Department will provide any public correspondence received after the submittal of this report in the Historic Preservation Commission's correspondence folder.

PROPERTY OWNER INPUT

The property owner is the City and County of San Francisco.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The case report and analysis under review was prepared by Department preservation staff. The Department has determined that the Diamond Heights Safety Wall on Block 7504, Lots 011-015 meets the requirements for Article 10 eligibility as an individual landmark. The justification inclusion is outlined below under the Significance and Integrity sections of this case report.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Diamond Heights Safety Wall is significant for its association with the Diamond Heights Redevelopment Project, which dramatically reshaped the area from largely undeveloped hills to a neighborhood characterized by postwar Modernist master planning, Bay Area regional Modernist design, mixed housing typologies, and expansive views of downtown San Francisco, Glen Canyon, and the Bay. The Diamond Heights Safety Wall is also notable work of Bay Area artist and architect Stefan Alexander Novak (b. 1918 – d. 2006). The site-specific work of public art serves a visual landmark – a gateway into Diamond Heights – and captures the aesthetic identity of the neighborhood which is characterized by a uniquely Bay Area regional idiom of Modernist design.

INTEGRITY

The Diamond Heights Safety Wall retains good integrity of location, design, workmanship, feeling and association; and overall retains sufficient integrity to express its significance under Criteria 1 and 3. The materials – primarily redwood and metal bolts – were intentionally left untreated so as to weather naturally; as such, the Safety Wall retains integrity of materials, but the condition should be assessed and monitored for structural stability. The prevalence of biological growth may be harmful to the long-term life of the Safety Wall, and obscures the wood texture and grain of the sculpture. Two of the concrete abutments, designed to be raw and unpainted, have been painted; the grey paint is relatively similar and sympathetic to the other raw concrete abutments. At least one instance of incised graffiti is observable at a close range, but overall all sculpture is in good material condition.

Maintenance on the Safety Wall and surrounding area has been deferred, resulting in slightly diminished integrity of setting. Novak's design intention for the Safety Wall was that sunlight would penetrate the sculpture from behind and result in a pattern of solid and void, and unique shadows. The growth of trees behind and adjacent to the Safety Wall over the last decades has obscured the sunlight behind the sculpture, diminishing the intended play of light and shadow, but could be remedied with pruning and maintenance of nearby vegetation. The encroachment of the adjacent trees is also potentially physically damaging the Safety Wall.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

Whenever a building, site, object, or landscape is under consideration for Article 10 landmark designation, the Historic Preservation Commission is required to identify character-defining features of the property. This is done to enable owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Staff recommends the character-defining features include the massing, form, structure, architectural ornament and materials identified as:

- Entire Safety Wall is approximately 32' high and 50' long
- Redwood construction, 10" x 10" square posts
- Naturally weathered, untreated redwood
- Bolts with cast iron washers articulate joints and act as functional ornament
- Round, recessed bolt holes are elements of the geometric ornament
- Open, spaced elements create a pattern of solid and void that is enhanced by sun and shadow due to the structure's orientation (primary façade faces north)
- Anchored by unpainted concrete abutments, which serve the engineering purpose of creating a structurally sound safety wall
- Geometric ornamentation created through angled notches in the redwood posts
- Round redwood ornaments with flower and dragonfly motifs
- Open, three-dimensional structure creates a pedestrian experience "in the round" - movement around and through the sculpture results in different patterns of overlapping geometric elements

BOUNDARIES OF THE LANDMARK SITE

Encompassing all of and limited to Lots 011-015 on the Assessor's Block 7504 on the south side of Diamond Heights Boulevard at Clipper Street near Portola Drive.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

Based on the Department's analysis, the Diamond Heights Safety Wall located on Block 7504, Lots 011-015 meet the requirements for Article 10 eligibility as an individual landmark as it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history and embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and represents the work of a master.

The subject property also meets two of the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation which include:

1. *The designation of buildings of Modern design*
The subject structure captures the aesthetic identity of its surrounding neighborhood which is characterized by a uniquely Bay Area regional idiom of Modernist design.
2. *The designation of buildings located in geographically underrepresented areas*
The subject property is located in an area that is geographically underrepresented in landmark buildings. There are no designated landmarks in the Diamond Heights neighborhood.

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission initiate Article 10 Landmark designation for the Diamond Heights Safety Wall as the subject property meets the eligibility requirements for Article 10 designation; meets two of the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation; and is a Community-Sponsored Landmark Designation Application.

Under Article 10, The Historic Preservation Commission may recommend approval, disapproval or approval with modifications of the proposed initiation of the Diamond Heights Safety Wall landmark designation. If the Historic Preservation Commission approves initiation, a second hearing will be held to consider whether or not to recommend the landmark designation to the Board of Supervisors. A copy of the motion of recommendation is then transmitted to the Board of Supervisors, which will hold a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation (Section 1004.4). If the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days (Section 1004.5).

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Landmark Designation Fact Sheet
- B. Historic Landmark Designation Application prepared by Robert Pullum
- C. Letters of support